



WHY SHOULD PHILOSOPHY IN MEDICINE BE REANIMATED?- CHANGING THE CULTURE OF MEDICAL EDUCATION

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Ever since the time of Hippocrates more than 2,500 years ago, western medical training has included instruction in philosophy, and for many centuries this remained almost unchanged. Among lettered physicians, some familiarity with natural philosophy was considered essential in the exercise of their profession. This is vividly reflected by Tertullian who said: "Philosophy is the sister of Medicine" (*medicina soror philosophiae*; in *De Anima*). More than two thousand years later, triggered by the increasing interest in the academic approach, scientific thinking became more and more important. New subjects like chemistry, botany and physiology emerged. In 1861, medical studies in Prussia/Germany were reformed. The "Tentamen philosophicum" was replaced by the "Tentamen physicum" which to this day functions as the medical preliminary examination. This change represented a complete reorientation with a primacy of the scientific side of medicine in Germany – similar to many other countries of the world at this time, including the United States [1].

Subjects related to the humanities were eliminated from the curriculum. In 1970, some 100 years later, several new subjects were added to the curriculum of medical studies in Germany: medical psychology, medical sociology, general medicine, ecology, psychosomatics and psychotherapy. This historical development resulted in the absence of philosophy in German studies and practice.

In recent years, physicians' medical daily routine in hospitals and practices has taken a dramatic turn for the worse: apart from non-work-related tasks like the encryption of diagnostics and procedures, an increasing number of administrative tasks have to be carried out. The development of an enormous cost pressure has had a considerable impact on the medical profession and independence of the medical practitioner [2]. This again has been proven to have immediate consequences on the physician's condition. Current studies, some of which have recently been published in "The Lancet", suggest that in point of fact physicians' quality of life is significant for the outcome of the quality of their patients' treatment and that this is barely considered in daily practice. The profession alone can no longer solve these problems. Modern Philosophy, however, could provide a strong starting-point for the analysis of possible causes.

The work of a physician is based on two pillars: scientific knowledge and technical expertise being one of them, the humanities, ethics and philosophy the other. The former is taught at medical school, the latter is often neglected. For this reason and in view of the preponderance of technology in the daily routine in clinics, many medical students and physicians would like to be offered an optional subject which focuses on philosophical problems: a training in Philosophy, called Philosophicum. To meet this demand, the University Hospital of Würzburg has been offering a Philosophicum ever since 2010 (www.philosophicum.ukw.de) [3].

It is often presumed that philosophy is too complicated, that it is a matter for experts, and that it is boring. The Philosophicum aims at eliminating this preconception. The seminars which will be held by differ-

ent speakers in the fields of medicine and philosophy are a general introduction to philosophy. The prospective physicians are to be motivated to think about the world, its people and their medical action in a systematic way.

The Philosophicum aims at providing a wide-ranging continuing learning experience for students, physicians and other groups that are interested in philosophical questions and topics that are directly related to the work of a physician. Apart from medical ethics, the teaching focuses on the history of philosophy, anthropological, logical and epistemological topics [4].

What is the underlying concept? What's usually associated with it first is "ethics in medicine", a currently popular topic at congresses, events, in articles and books. The Philosophicum for Physicians is based on the assumption that the subject of medicine will generate philosophical questions of its own (see table 1). The questions can concern medical ethics, but can also be of scientific-theoretical, methodological, sociological nature etc. It wants to raise fundamental questions (e.g. how the extreme differentiation in medicine leads to questioning its uniformity and therefore to the question concerning its relations between specialization and "integrative medicine"). Thus the question about the function and the systematic location of the "conciliatory consultation" also arises ("embedding" the "diagnosis" into the patient's specific life story). The relation between "information" and "meaning" is in the focus (for the patient: the same piece of information can have a different "meaning"). Therefore, hermeneutic, methodical and practical problems from medical practice are addressed.

The Philosophicum generally also serves the purpose of determining general questions regarding the classification of medicine into the disciplinary framework, the function of the canon (of teaching) and of (scientific) innovations as a whole and of determining the procedures in medical studies. Furthermore, scientific-political, economic and institutional frameworks are discussed which become criticizable through making them a topic of discussion, through raising awareness (what meaning does the scientific approach have, which has predominated since the 19th Century, for "therapeutical" procedures, the understanding of health, illness, medicine, etc.). Another central element of reflexion is the "humanum" in general and its "existence", an almost forgotten basis of medicine and an originally central topic of classic philosophy. In the focus are the "Humanum" of the physician himself and his self-conception. To this day, these important topics have not been discussed in human medicine studying, apart from the medical humanities [5] that miss the above mentioned systematic approach.

The Philosophicum therefore aims at providing a forum for the discussion with students and experts – either from the University or external practicing physicians and nursing staff. Serving this purpose, guest speakers talk about certain topics and encourage subsequent discussions. This creates a place of open exchange and orientation in a highly differentiated field of science, so that the "training", i.e. study-

ing a range of subjects, is enriched through reflected questioning based on applying frameworks. Hippocrates thought that Philosophy should be brought into medicine and medicine into philosophy. The establishment of the Philosophicum in Würzburg thus represents the beginning of a historically motivated model project in the field of teaching, since philosophy can benefit from this project as well. That in turn would be a benefit for physicians and the recipient of medical treatment, the patient himself.

Table 1: Fundamental Questions of The Philosophicum

1. Is it still valid to embrace the current science based medicine curriculum at the cost of the exclusion of fundamental philosophical questions, including the meaning of life and the base of patient doctor relationship?
2. What are the scientific paradigms and axioms of modern medicine?
3. Does the current science based medical curriculum provide a sufficient representation of human nature or a reductionist view?
4. What is the role of empathy, trust and humanity in a patient-doctor relationship. Can they be quantified scientifically?
5. What is the composition of a more holistic medical education in comparison to the current science based curriculum?

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